DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 257 121 CS 208 972

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TITLE VDTs as Potential Health Hazards: A Critical Analysis.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 26p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (68th, Memphis, TN, August 3-6, 1985).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Computers; *Employer Attitudes; Employers; Federal Legislation; Media Research; *Newspapers; *Occupational Safety and Health; *Radiation Effects; *Technological Advancement
IDENTIFIERS American Newspaper Publishers Association; Employer Role; Gatekeeper Role; Newspaper Guild; *Video Display Terminals

ABSTRACT

Almost from the introduction of the new technology into newsrooms, the video display terminal (VDT) has raised health concerns. Ironically, the newspaper industry--which ordinarily would be at the forefront, acting as a watchdog over worker health and safety concerns--has initiated little news coverage of the VDT radiation issue. The Newspaper Guild and other employee organizations have mounted campaigns to ensure VDT regulation, while the American Newspaper Publishers Association and state and national press associations think education is better than legislation. Both sides, however, engage in misinformation campaigns that only serve to make more confusing the contradicitory scientific evidence concerning VDT radiation hazards. By exercising their roles as "media gatekeepers," publishers may be guilty of subordinating the public interest to their private interests, since the VDT is an efficient, cost saving tool in the newsroom. (HTH)

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VDTs AS POTENTIAL HEALTH HAZARDS:

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The potential health hazards from VDT radiation emission have become an Information Age issue which has received little news media coverage. Proponents and opponents of VDT safety regulation have squared off in a debate which threatens to push further into legislative and societal arenas. While the issue has engulfed the newspaper industry, "pink collar" industries such as banking and insurance have also grown concerned. The Newspaper Guild and other employee organizations have mounted campaigns to ensure VDT regulation, while the American Newspaper Publishers Association and state and national press associations think education is better than legislation. Still, both sides to the issue engage in misinformation campaigns which only serve to make more confusing the contradictory scientific evidence on VDT health hazards. Meanwhile, the publishers, who are key gatekeepers, have managed an effective news blackout on the controversy which sometimes rages within their own newsrooms. With the issue treated largely as a non-story, the publisher-gatekeepers have largely harnessed and muzzled the newspaper watchdog.

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Paper to be presented at the AEJMC annual convention, Mass Communication & Society Division, Memphis State University, Aug. 3, 1985.

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I. Introduction

Today, about 50,000 video display terminals are in use in newspapers throughout the country; no longer concentrated in the newsroom or classified advertising department, VDTs are also found in display advertising, the mailroom, and the composing room.[1] However, almost from the introduction of the new technology into newsrooms, VDT users have raised health concerns. The acuteness of the alleged VDT health problems, as felt by users, has led to moves for state and federal regulation. This year, legislative activity to regulate VDT usage is underway in as many as 18 states.[2]

Demands for regulation have come from such groups as the Newspaper Guild, the AFL-CIO's Service Employees' Union (SEIU), and 9 to 5, a national office workers' organization. Proponents of VDT legislation, most notably the Newspaper Guild, argue that contrary scientific evidence on the health hazards posed by VDT usage require regulation to insure user health and safety,[3] while opponents of legislation claim that the lack of conclusive evidence of health hazards means that the newspaper industry should use education rather than legislation as a means to address the VDT issue.[4] The American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA), one of the strongest opponents to VDT legislation, has said the best way to approach the VDT issue is to allow the natural forces of the market to operate so that manufacturers which sell inferior VDTs will be penalized and manufacturers which produce quality products will be rewarded.[5]

ANPA's director of technical research has said:

> VDTs are being used in our public schools and universities today as were slide rules, calculators, and typewriters a generation ago: when these students reach the work force, they will have adapted to the proper use of this equipment and the problems will have disappeared without legislation.[6]

An irony to this Information Age issue over potential health hazards from VDT radiation emission and over ergonomics, or work station design, is that the newspaper industry—which ordinarily would be at the forefront acting as a watchdog over health and safety concerns over workers' exposure to toxic substances, harmful radiation, or dangerous chemicals—has initiated little news coverage, especially about the VDT radiation issue. That has prompted one researcher to comment: "VDT users do not feel the same way as VDT owners do about the brave new electronic world. What is increasingly heard is a cry of pain, and it should be heeded."[7]

In addition, VDT legislation proponents note that foreign countries—most notably West Germany and Japan—already have promulgated VDT guidelines calling for hourly rest breaks, proper lighting, adjustable equipment and periodic health examinations for operators, while employers and manufacturers in the United States have opposed mandatory safety standards as unwieldy.[8] Furthermore, the executive director of 9 to 5 has said:

> We find it even stranger that, in order to enter foreign markets with strong safety and health standards, U.S. computer manufacturers manage to build superior and safer VDTs—for export only. Clearly these same manufacturers are waiting to be told they must observe the same consideration for the health and safety of U.S. workers.[9]

Plainly, the issue of VDT health hazards is here to stay. Legislation to regulate VDT usage, tort litigation and workmens' compensation cases are almost certain to find their place in the newspaper employee-employer

relationship, and debate over possible VDT health hazards may grow even more heated. The newspaper industry thus faces two competing concerns: utilization of a technological innovation which creates greater efficiency in the workplace and the protection of employees from potential VDT health hazards. This paper will critically analyze efforts toward regulating VDT usage. The paper first examines (1) the health risks involved in VDT usage, and (2) the responses to these potential health hazards by various legislatures, unions, publishers' groups, and other segments of the work force. The paper concludes with an assessment of the responses to the VDT health hazards issue.

That assessment will attempt to explain why the VDT health hazards issue has not been the subject of widespread publicity by the press. Underlying the decisions not to publish stories—particularly with respect to the low level radiation issue—are the news selection behavior of newspaper gatekeepers and the affect of social control in the newsroom. Much emphasis has been placed on possible influences on news selection by newspaper gatekeepers.[10] Also, Breed concluded that social control in the newsroom exists with the publisher's policy usually followed by newsmen who learn the policy by osmosis and that because the newsman's source of rewards is from his colleagues and superiors, the newsman "redefines his values to the more pragmatic level of the newsroom group.[11] Furthermore, Atwood's study of socialization of news values in beginning reporters concludes that students change their news values during the course of a single newswriting class to more closely reflect the news values of their individual instructors.[12] Finally, studies by Donohew,[13] Bowers,[14] and Gieber[15] support Breed's hypothesis

of publisher control. Thus, with the VDT health hazards issue—in which there is an "in-house" interest in opposing VDT regulation which would be costly to ownership—publishers may be active and influential gatekeepers whose behavior may include such overt acts as sponsoring seminars designed to ward off fears among employees over possible VDT health problems or implementation of a policy which may "trickle down" through the newsroom through osmosis to a point where other newspaper gatekeepers, including reporters, treat the issue as a non-story.

II. Health Risks Involved in VDT Usage

Video display terminal user concerns fall into two broad categories: ergonomics and radiation emission. No one disputes that VDTs emit radiation. Inside the VDT is a source of electrons and a phosphor-coated screen which produces a visible glow when an "electron gun" or cathode shoots the electrons from a source to the screen.[16] What is disputed, however, is the type of radiation VDTs emit, the level of the emissions, and whether emissions are harmful to humans.[17]

Radiation safety experts hold widely divergent opinions as to the safety of VDTs.[18] Some experts contend that VDTs are safe because their radiation emissions fall far below existing federal and international standards of radiation exposure.[19] However, a counterargument is that these groups assume federal standards define the level of safe exposure and that VDT emissions generally fall below the federal standards, and that because of such reasoning, these same groups "define 'safety' as synonymous with 'compliance,' a conclusion that flies in the face of the negligible scientific knowledge that exists in this area."[20]

Others contend that all forms of radiation—including those emitted by VDTs—pose a health hazard.[21] Some researchers warn that if the VDT poses significant health threats, then VDT operators could suffer a fate similar to asbestos workers who unwittingly subjected themselves to health risks for years.[22] But while researchers agree that radiation emissions of high frequency—ionizing radiation—undisputably damage humans when given at high levels,[23] research is inconclusive on whether the non-ionizing or very low frequency (VLF) radiation emitted by VDTs is harmful to humans.[24] The most recent study—conducted by members of Dr. Jose Delgado's laboratory at Centro y Cajal Hospital in Madrid, Spain—suggests that radiation similar to that emitted by VDTs can have dramatic, adverse effects on chick embryos, but even though Delgado is a respected scientist and his laboratory has an international reputation, some researchers have reacted to his findings with skepticism and cannot understand how such weak radiation can have such devastating effects.[25]

So far, no causal link between VDT radiation exposure and human harms has been conclusively established. Still, allegations of injury do exist. The most widely publicized allegations occurred in problem pregnancies and miscarriages among women who worked on or near VDTs in offices in the United States and Canada.[26] Those cases merely suggest that VDT exposure <u>may</u> pose health risks to the VDT operator, the unborn child, and the progeny of both male and female operators.[27] Also, the combination of the various frequencies of radiation emitted by the VDT <u>may</u> compound the hazards of exposure; this compounded effect, called synergism, <u>may</u> exacerbate the hazards to the operator by making the operator more susceptible to each particular frequency's effects.[28]

While the scientific evidence is inconclusive, the ANPA has long

contended that the consensus of research efforts seems to be that VDTs are not a hazardous source of radiation. ANPA's production engineers conducted tests for radiation emissions as early as 1971 with negative results: no evidence of radiation emissions at dangerous levels to operators.[29] Furthermore, ANPA reports that VDTs have been cleared for radiation safety by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), manufacturers and large corporation users, and also that the House Science and Technology Committee found no harmful radiation.[30]

Despite ANPA claims that no evidence exists to show that VDT radiation emissions cause harm to humans, the Newspaper Guild points to a series of scientific studies which suggest that VDTs may be related to operators' health problems.[31] In response to a Guild request, NIOSH in 1980 surveyed VDT operators and studied conditions under which operators were working at the San Francisco Examiner, San Francisco Chronicle, Oakland Tribune, and Blue Shield offices in San Francisco. NIOSH found significantly higher incidences of eyestrain, pain and stiffness in the limbs, and other physical problems among VDT operators, and based on its findings in San Francisco and elsewhere, NIOSH issued a series of recommendations on VDT health and safety which deal with ergonomic factors such as glare, rest breaks, eye exams, screen brightness, and adjustable seating.

Perhaps the most indicting statement with regard to potential health hazards from VDT radiation emissions is contained in a law review article which catalogues scientific evidence on VDT radiation emissions, notes that scientific evidence is inconclusive, and then proposes that legislators and policymakers at the federal level should recognize the constraints of

the limited medical knowledge of potential VDT health hazards and strive to establish the best possible health safeguards through legislative action.[32] The article recommends that changes be made in the Radiation Control for Health and Safety Act (RCHS Act)[33] so that the potential risks from VDT radiation will be subject to federal regulation.[34] In its conclusion, the article says:

> The twentieth century clerical workforce faces potential dangers from the radiation emissions of VDT terminals. The widespread use of VDTs, the gravity of potential dangers to VDT operators and to their unborn children, and the national goal of protecting the public from electronic product radiation all compel the adoption of new standards designed specifically to protect VDT operators.[35]

III. Responses to Potential VDT Health Hazards

A. Legislative Actions to Compel Worker Protection

In 1981, the VDT issue surfaced in state legislatures. The first VDT bill was introduced in Maine, but it did not advance beyond the hearing stage. By 1983, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Oregon had considered VDT legislation. At year's end, Maine and Connecticut had enacted legislation calling for study on the health and safety effects of VDTs. Fifteen states considered VDT legislation in 1984, but no regulatory legislation was enacted.[36] This year, the Newspaper Guild, SEIU, and 9 to 5 have targeted 18 states in the first step of a nationwide push to compel VDT-safety regulatory actions.[37]

California Assemblyman Tom Hayden is among legislators who have responded to 9 to 5 and SEIU by introducing VDT regulation legislation in 1984 and 1985. Hayden has said:

> There is often a negative side to the way technological changes are introduced. Little or no attention is given any worker health or environmental consequences until long after the technological change occurs, as in the case of the petrochemical industry, whose toxic waste now threatens to drown us.[38]

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In Minnesota, two legislators are sponsoring a bill that would give the state Commissioner of Labor and Industry the authority to define and enforce "an ergonomically correct workstation" for those who work with VDTs more than 60 percent of the day. However, some legislators oppose VDT regulation. Rhode Island Rep. Charles Baldelli says he has yet to hear any evidence of harmful VDT effects from expert witnesses and claims he is not likely to vote for VDT regulation because: "Maybe it's just another witch hunt. When they first introduced the typewriter, somebody probably said, 'Oh my God, people will hurt their fingers!'"[39]

While all VDT bills address the radiation issue, most bills, including a model VDT bill[40] drawn up by the Newspaper Guild, typically address ocular and ergonomics issues and require work station design standards, mandated eye exams, regular rest breaks, and provision for fines for non-compliance. The concern over radiation is reflected in every bill, however. In Wisconsin, a VDT regulation bill contained this provision: "Each terminal shall be checked by an accredited third party for radiation leakage during the original installation, after any maintenance is performed, and semiannually."[41]

At the federal level, VDT legislation hardly seems imminent. Even though NIOSH has conducted some VDT studies, NIOSH staff members admitted in the spring of 1983 that they could not measure the very low frequency radiation emitted by VDTs while at a job site but would instead need to conduct measurements in a laboratory setting.[42] Thus, scientific facts about VDT radiation continue to be contradictory. A new NIOSH study is planned, but it may take more than three years to complete.[43] Hence, the majority of the legislative action is concentrated at the state level where Claudia James, ANPA counsel, believes that VDT legislation is "not going to go away."[44]

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B. Union Actions to Compel Worker Protection

The Newspaper Guild, the AFL-CIO's Service Employees Union, and 9 to 5 have been the most active proponents of VDT legislation. The Guild, acting on VDT user concerns and recommendations from NIOSH studies of VDT operators, has met resistance in incorporating VDT health and safety measures into the Guild's collective bargaining contracts; for example, by 1982 the Guild had provisions for radiation testing in only 21 out of about 200 contracts, provisions for eye exams in 24, rest breaks in 10 and employer-paid VDT eyeglasses in 12.[45] The Guild's research director notes: "We have negotiated improvements in many cases, but in many others there has been resistance to improving conditions that are, from a health standpoint, nothing short of outrageous."[46]

Perhaps because of resistance to including VDT health and safety regulation provisions in Guild contracts, the Newspaper Guild has joined forces with SEIU and 9 to 5 to push for VDT regulation through legislative actions. Whatever, the debate has become more intense and seems likely to continue. SEIU president John Sweeney has said that because of VDTs, "The health and safety problems faced by today's office workers are no less serious than the problems faced by industrial workers in the 1900s, and they are even more insidious because of their subtlety."[47] On the other hand, 9 to 5 has said that the numerous studies that have found no radiation threat from VDTs have not put the issue to rest because the studies have not dealt with the non-ionizing, low frequency level radiation emitted by VDTs.[48] Thus, equipped with scientific evidence to suit any point of view, both sides in the VDT issue appear ready to draw the battle line at statehouse doors.

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C. Counterattacks from publishers' groups

L. Peyton Hendricks, staff counsel for ANPA, cast the VDT issue in a "futurist" perspective, noting that one prediction is that 60 percent of all American workers will perform tasks using a VDT by the year 2000; but, he claims, for newspapers, the "year 2000 has already arrived."[49] Given that VDTS are pervasive in the communications workplace, Hendricks recommends that study of them should not be "relegated a low priority," but he also recommends "strong resistance to union proposals that attempt to impose a formulatory solution to VDT environmental problems, if in fact such problems exist."[50] In other words, ANPA's position is that VDT regulation should not proceed with a blanket approach but instead should take into account office-by-office differences. Office-by-office approaches to VDT ergonomic problems dominate American attitudes.[51] However, it's argued that individual solutions on the whole, ignore radiation standards and that, historically, individuals who have been subjected to long term, non-ionizing radiation--or their survivors--have had difficulty prevailing in tort litigation because the government will not release information relating to military uses of radiation, and because prior settlements have been made secretly.[52] In addition, little precedent exists to help the VDT-injured litigant in the prosecution of his or her case.[53]

The ANPA offers its members two types of VDT terminal studies--radiation and ergonomics studies--which all conclude that no health hazards exist with regard to VDT usage. Still, ANPA's manager of environmental services has reported that "ANPA reluctantly purchased radiation equipment in 1982 because of persistent member requests for radiation monitoring."[54] The same individual admits also that ANPA

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does not have instruments to measure very low frequency radiation since such instruments do not yet exist, and he also says, "When contacted by members about radiation testing, we try to dispel the myths about VDTs and radiation without a study."[55] George R. Cashau, ANPA's director of technical research, stressed education as the answer to VDT health problems in a recent appearance before the Oregon House Labor Committee.[56] Cashau said that ANPA provides its members with industrial hygienists who analyze VDT work stations and make recommendations for improvments and that manufacturers and users have developed training and educational materials for VDT operators; in addition, he said that ANPA will continue to conduct seminars "to provide educational information about VDT operation."[57] Cashau advocates an office-by-office approach to solving any potential VDT/ergonomics problems because "each newspaper is unique with its own specialized problems;" much for the same reason, he also says it is inappropriate for government to set VDT standards:

> By cavalierly embracing one standard over another in a regulation, we would be retarding the development which continues to be made in the design of work stations. Therefore, I would urge you as legislators to allow these natural (market) forces to operate and to encourage competition among manufacturers for this ever increasing business.[58]

Both Cashau and Dr. Howard R. Brown, medical director of the New York Times, have testified against VDT regulation on behalf of ANPA. Testifying at congressional hearings in June 1984 against the need for VDT legislation, Cashau said "inaccurate information" has aroused employee fears, and Brown said he was aware of "no medical evidence which demonstrates serious health effects from VDT usage."[59] In addition, Brown discounted results of NIOSH studies of VDT users at San Francisco and Oakland newspapers which detected VDT-related

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health problems, citing "non-compliance with strict survey research procedures as well as the fact that difficult labor negotiations were under way at that time."[60] Brown also described expert testimony given by Dr. Arthur Frank at the congressional hearings as "a 'purported' scientific study of VDT operators in the newspaper industry."[61] Frank's study was prepared, Brown testified, "in the absence of peer review and with problems in methodology inherent."[62] Such arguments and counterarguments typify both the scientific and legislative history of the VDT issue—leaving no clear winner.

The ANPA, which represents nearly 1,400 newspapers, accounting for more than 90 percent of U.S. daily and Sunday circulation,[63] also receives strong support in its campaign to defeat VDT legislation from state press associations, many of which have lobbyists. David R. West, executive director of the Illinois Press Association said, he expects a VDT bill to be reintroduced into the Illinois General Assembly in 1985. "Our position and reaction regarding the VDT are the same: All-out opposition," West said in a recent letter.[64] The manager of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, J. LeRoy Yorgason, says his organization has adopted a position against VDT legislation. He adds: "Every publisher who has become aware of the potential for a law on VDTs has opposed it. I have yet to meet a publisher in favor of it."[65] Although the Minnesota Newspaper Association has made no formal statements on a VDT bill, association manager Linda Falkman writes:

> "We are opposed to VDT legislation because we feel that employers are and should be taking care of the ergonomic conditions in the work place. Also the cost to employers of annual eye exams could be very substantial and probably should not be the responsibility of the employer. Our bill does not address the radiation issue, but there have been no conclusive studies showing any harm from radiation.[66]

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In Ohio, a coalition of industries and the Ohio Newspaper Association have joined forces to oppose VDT legislation. In testimony before a house committee, the executive director of the state press association opposed VDT legislation for two reasons: Because the bill is viewed as an unnecessary intrusion between labor and management and because portions of the bill create specific work place rules that are totally unworkable.[67] The press association director noted that VDT legislation does not differentiate between the newspaper reporter, using a VDT once in a while (not 8 hours per day) and getting up often for research or phone calls, and a person at an insurance company who uses a VDT all day.[68] In testimony before the House committee, the executive director also said legislation would require noise covers for VDTs. He added:

> Noise is not a problem with VDTs, but the bill proposes a maximum level of 65 decibels which is far below OSHA standards. . . . Thus we may be facing the situation of putting noise covers on typewriters as well as on word processing printers. Neither of these pieces of equipment need noise covers, but this bill provides for them . . . Our position is that the bill is a bad bill, poorly conceived, too restrictive and a deadly force that will obstruct the future economic development of Ohio.[69]

In another development in some states, newspaper industry lobbying threatens to spill over into the newsroom. In Massachusetts, for example, which has a thriving computer industry, the state newspaper publishers' association has instructed its members that stories on VDT legislation should be "carefully screened" prior to publication.[70] The Massachusetts Newspaper Publishers Association Bulletin cautioned members:

> Unions, particularly the 9 to 5 organization, have been distributing propaganda conjuring up all kinds of perils to the safety of operators, and some of the information is being fed to young reporters who do not understand all of the elements involved in the dispute. The ambition of young reporters to achieve a page-one-byline is ever-

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> present and the consequences can cause serious damage. Misinterpretation of facts and statements is also dangerous, especially to business interests.[71]

Yet another development has been the presence of editorials opposing VDT bills—without mention of the publishers' financial stake in the issue.[72] For example, the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch attacked a VDT bill in an editorial entitled "Assault on VDTs":

> It's a good thing that some of the present members of the Ohio General Assembly weren't around when the pencil was invented. Had they been, the world's most basic writing instrument might today come equipped with a tip safety shield with see-through visor, work gloves, protective eyeglasses, ear-shields, and an anti-chew guard. And it would, of course, contain no lead and be made of splinter-free material. All of this would have been done in the name of "operator safety." Well, the doodlers and scribblers were spared this nonsense, but the users of the world's current basic writing instrument—the video display terminal—may not be so lucky.[73]

The editorial called for the defeat of the Ohio bill, noting derisively, "We did, after all, survive the pencil."[74]

D. What Other Segments of the Work Force Say About VDT Legislation

As in Ohio, where a coalition of industries has joined together to oppose VDT legislation, the story is much the same in Rhode Island where one state representative warns that VDT legislation would have a "chilling effect" on businesses considering locating in the state.[75] A Minnesota state senator, Eric Petty, has issued the same kind of warning. "It's turned into a business climate issue," he said. "Minnesota, like other states, is trying to stress high technology development, and part of the argument is that VDT regulation would impede the growth of high technology."[76]

Meanwhile, the Computer and Business Equipment Manufacturers Association (CBEMA) has formed a Coalition for Workplace Technology composed of 42 national trade associations whose aim is to lobby against VDT bills. CBEMA's communications director has said that protecting workers from

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VDT radiation is "like protecting them from light bulbs. It's like employees saying, 'The office is filled with cosmic rays and we need to fight them with balloons.'"[77] CBEMA's argument, of course, is that no medical evidence exists to show that VDTs are related to health problems. Bill Hanrahan, the association's senior director, says the problems workers are complaining about are not unique to computers and that stress has nothing to do with VDTs:

> Anyone who sits in one position for a long period of time will get a sore back. . . . You experience stress in almost anything you do in your life. Stress has to do with the employer-employee relationship. It has nothing to do with VDTs.[78]

Other groups have also actively campaigned against VDT legislation. In the East, the Medical Society of the state of New York, which represents 25,000 physicians, passed a resolution opposing VDT legislation; in this resolution, the Society urged that accurate information be provided to employers and users about VDTs.[79] Three other organizations—the Electronic Industries Association, the Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers, and the National Association of Broadcasters—have formed a lobbying group called the Electromagnetic Energy Policy Alliance which opposes VDT bills.[80]

Probably, the number of organizations which address the VDT issue will increase if the debate intensifies although Mike Dorais of the California Publishers Association maintains "the (VDT) topic doesn't interest people because the technology is relatively new."[81] However, as VDTs become more pervasive, more and more people may become interested and with literature on both sides flooding into the mainstream of thought, writers such as Paul Brodeur may command a larger audience. Brodeur's The Zapping of America outlines the hazards of microwave radiation and also charges that the electronics industry and the Defense Department have a record of manipulating

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and suppressing information on the health hazards posed by non-ionizing radiation that is vital to the VDT safety debate, thus making it difficult for the press to get the full story on the issue.[82]

III. Conclusion

While a handful of newspapers has covered the relatively non-controversial subject of work station design or ergonomics, many newspapers appear to have neglected coverage of possible VDT radiation hazards.[83] According to one report, little news coverage in the United States followed Canadian research findings which suggest that very low frequency radiation from VDTs may be linked to a cluster of birth defects and miscarriages among workers at 11 Canadian and U.S. work sites; a computer search of five major U.S. newspapers—The New York Times, Washington Post, The Christian Science Monitor, The Wall Street Journal, and the Los Angeles Times—and the two principal wire services revealed that none had mentioned the Canadian finding.[84] Whether the VDT issue is so new that newspapers don't yet see it as a newsworthy subject or whether newspaper executives are subtle in stifling coverage of the issue, the fact remains that other than some publicity about ergonomic problems, coverage of the more volatile VDT radiation issue has been scant in American newspapers. The ominous conclusion could be that the newspaper's financial function may indeed override its newsgathering and reporting functions—resulting in an "in-house" chilling effect on coverage of the VDT issue.

Also, the VDT issue invites misinformation campaigns. A point in case: The executive director of Allied Daily Newspapers—a daily newspaper organization which represents newspapers in the Pacific Northwest—

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lobbied this author on the virtues of VDTs. He wrote:

> You might be interested that Allied has done an informal tally of babies born to mothers who work at terminals in the 50-plus daily newspaper plants in the Pacific Northwest over the past several years. We've recorded 43 healthy births and just one abnormality (a "turned-in foot" which, of course, could result from many possible causes). The ratio of normal to abnormal births represented in this tally would suggest that working at a VDT is beneficial to pregnancies, since the normal odds of abnormal birth are something like one in ten.[85]

Allied's executive director also serves as lobbyist for the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association and for Allied Daily Newspapers, and thus his position is hardly neutral. A lack of objectivity in reporting VDT health hazards from purportedly authoritative sources may be yet another reason why newspapers have not covered the VDT issue thoroughly. Vested interests in controversial issues ordinarily does not prevent journalists from covering news stories, but with the VDT issue the verification of facts and findings would certainly be a difficult task for any journalist.

The VDT issues can be divided into three areas: ergonomics, ocular, and radiation issues. Thus far, no federal standards regulate any of the three areas, but the VDT issue that has clearly generated the most concern is radiation emissions. And since as many as seven million office workers, including nearly 50,000 VDT operators at newspapers, are exposed to any possible health hazards from VDTs, it's obvious that both information and misinformation campaigns will grow as The Newspaper Guild, 9 to 5, SEIU, the Communications Workers of America, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, CBEMA, publishers' groups, ANPA, and other organizations continue their efforts to persuade federal agencies and state legislators either to establish VDT regulations or to pass legislation, or to allow industry to deal with problems on an office-to-office basis.

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The issue isn't likely to go away as organizations such as 9 to 5 remain vociferous toward the radiation issue and both 9 to 5 and the Communication Workers of America continue to use the VDT issue as an organizing tool for office workers, especially in the banking and insurance industries.[86]

Furthermore, since the scientific evidence on possible adverse health effects of VDTs is contradictory, the VDT issue is likely to gravitate more and more to legislative and societal issues. If the issue continues to drift toward a business and high tech controversy—one that may potentially retard economic development—the news media may "discover" the issue and begin to treat it much like the asbestos issue.

Today, there is a dearth of reporting on the VDT issue—especially the potential radiation hazard. Publishers, through exercising control of the gatekeeping process, may be guilty of subordinating the public interest to their private interests, as already it appears that with respect to the VDT health hazards issue the watchdog function of the press has been sacrificed at the altar of private enterprise.

Certainly, every reporter learns which issues at his newspaper are considered "sacred cows" and are, therefore, off limits to reporting. The VDT health hazards issue surely is one of those "sacred cows" that reporters learn about through osmosis or publisher gatekeeping. To be sure, the VDT issue has spilled over into "pink collar" and newspaper industries, and the debate, which has effectively been silenced by the press, can be expected to loom larger as VDTs become even more pervasive in the workplace.

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NOTES

1. Claudia M. James, American Newspaper Publishers Association counsel, "VDT Legislation," given at Gannett Human Resources Conference, San Antonio, Texas, June 17, 1984.

2. "Join 18-state drive to regulate VDTs, locals are urged," The Guild Reporter, Jan. 11, 1985.

3. David J. Eisen, research director, The Newspaper Guild, statement submitted to the Labor and Commerce Committee, Illinois House of Representatives, April 25, 1984.

4. Howard R. Brown, medical director of The New York Times, and George Cashau, American Newspaper Publishers Association technical research director, "Safety and Health Effects of VDTs in the Workplace," given at House Education and Labor Committee's Subcommittee on Health and Safety, Washington, D.C., June 5, 1984.

5. George R. Cashau, testimony for the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association before the Oregon House Labor Committee, Feb. 27, 1985, pp. 6-7.

6. Ibid., p. 7.

7. David J. Eisen, "VDTs as a Health Problem: The Newspaper Guild's Experience," COMM/ENT, Vol. 4 (Summer 1982), p. 630.

8. The Guild Reporter, op. cit, p. 6.

9. Ibid.

10. See David Manning White, "The 'Gate Keeper': A Case Study in the Selection of News," Journalism Quarterly 27: 383-96, (Fall 1950); Roy E. Carter, Jr., "Newspaper 'Gatekeepers' and the Sources of News," Public Opinion Quarterly 22: 133-44, (Summer 1958); Walter Gieber, "How the 'Gatekeepers' View Local Civil Liberties News," Journalism Quarterly 37: 199-205, (Spring 1960); David L. Grey, "Decision-Making by a Reporter Under Deadline Pressure," Journalism Quarterly 43: 419-28, (Autumn 1966); Robert P. Judd, "The Newspaper Reporter in a Suburban City," Journalism Quarterly 38: 35-42, (Winter 1961); Timothy P. Meyer, "News Reporter Bias: A Case Study in Selective Perception," Journal of Broadcasting 16: 195-203, (Spring 1972); Howard L. Seeman, "Keeping the Gates at the Chicago Defender," Journalism Quarterly 48: 275-8, (Summer 1971); Walter Gieber, "Across the Desk: A Study of 16 Telegraph Editors," Journalism Quarterly 33: 422-32, (Fall 1956); Robert L. Jones, et al., "News Selection Patterns from a State TTS-Wire," Journalism Quarterly 38: 303-12, (Summer 1961); B.H. Liebes, "Decision-Making by Telegraph Editors—AP or UPI?" Journalism Quarterly 43: 434-42, (Autumn 1966); Paul B. Snider, "Mr. Gates' Revisited: A 1966 Version of the 1949 Case Study," Journalism Quarterly 44: 419-27, (Autumn 1967); D. Charles Whitney, "Information Overload in the Newsroom," Journalism Quarterly 58: 69-76, 161, (Spring 1981); D. Charles Whitney and Lee B. Becker, "'Keeping the Gates' for Gatekeepers: The Effect of Wire News," Journalism Quarterly 59: 60-65, (Spring 1982).

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11. Warren Breed, "Social Control in the Newsroom: A Functional Analysis," Social Forces 33: 326-35 (May 1955).

12. L. Erwin Atwood and Gerald L. Grotta, "Socialization of News Values in Beginning Reporters," Journalism Quarterly 50: 759-61 (Winter 1973).

13. Lewis Donohew, "Newspapaer Gatekeepers and Forces in the News Channel," Public Opinion Quarterly 31: 61-8 (Summer 1963).

14. David R. Bowers, "A Report on Activity by Publishers in Directing Newsroom Decisions," Journalism Quarterly 44: 43-52 (Spring 1967).

15. Gieber, "How the 'Gatekeepers'", op. cit.

16. Sheryl Gordon McCloud, "Pink Collar Blues: Potential Hazards of Video Display Terminal Radiation," Southern California Law Review, 57 (November 1983), p. 142.

17. Ibid., p. 144.

18. Compare National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, "Potential Health Hazards of Video Display Terminals," 10 (June 1981) in which NIOSH concluded that VDTs do not emit radiation levels that present a hazard to exposed employees, hereinafter cited as NIOSH 1981 Report, and "VDTs—A New Social Disease?" Harvard Medical School Health Newsletter, April 1983, at 1 ("on the basis of existing evidence, there appears to be no radiation hazard from VDTs") with New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health, Inc., "Health Protection for Operators of VDTs/CRTs," 14 (1980) (criticizing government and industry radiation tests for their omissions and concluding "very low doses of radiation can be hazardous and there is no known safe level of exposure.")

19. E.g., National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Health Hazard Evaluation Summaries 34 (Jan. 1982) ("The level of ionizing, X-ray, and non-ionizing radiation were below the current occupational exposure standards from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and NIOSH . . . NIOSH has concluded that there is no radiation hazard to the employees working on or near the terminals."); NIOSH 1981 Report, supra note 12, at 10 ("After considering the maximum measured radiation levels, the current exposure standards and the present knowledge of the biological effects of radiation, NIOSH concluded that VDTs do not emit radiation levels that present a hazard to exposed employees.")

20. McCloud, op. cit., p. 143.

21. Ibid.

22. Jeff Sorensen and John Swan, "VDTs: The Overlooked Story Right in the Newsroom," Columbia Journalism Review (January/February 1981), at 32, 38.

23. See, e.g., Comptroller General, Report to the Congress of the United States, "Problems in Assessing the Cancer Risks of Low-Level Ionizing Radiation Exposure at ii (Jan. 2, 1981) ("large acute dose of ionizing radiation can kill a person within a few days").

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24. See, e.g., ibid. at 4 ("Scientists cannot yet characterize what cancer fundamentally is, much less describe precisely what role radiation plays in causing it.")

25. Louis Slesin, "VDT radiation: What's known, what isn't," Columbia Journalism Review (November/December 1984), p. 40.

26. See "VDTs: Eighth Cluster of Pregnancy Problems," Microwave News, July/August 1982, at 1 and "Provincial VDT Operators Report High Rate of Miscarriages," VDT Newsletter (Summer 1982), at 2.

27. McCloud, op. cit., p. 150.

28. See B. DeMatteo, The Hazards of VDTs (K. Fitz Randolph, ed., 1981), p. 29.

29. Richard W. Neergaard, manager of environmental services, American Newspaper Publishers Technical Research Department, speech given at Fourth Annual ANPA Health and Safety Symposium, Oct. 11, 1984, Chicago, Ill.

30. L. Peyton Hendricks, "OSHA, NIOSH and the VDT Issue," COMM/ENT, vol. 4 (Summer 1982), p. 633.

31. Eisen, op. cit., pp. 2-12.

32. McCloud, op. cit., p. 141.

33. 42 U.S.C., Section 263b-263n (1976 & Supp. V 1981).

34. McCloud, op. cit., p. 165.

35. Ibid., p. 168.

36. Claudia H. James, "VDT Legislation: An Update," given at ANPA Safety and Health Symposium, Chicago, Ill., Oct. 12, 1984.

37. The Guild Reporter, op. cit., p. 1.

38. Jane Carroll, "An Information Age issue: Are VDTs a health hazard?" State Legislatures (February 1985), p. 6.

39. Ibid.,

40. A Model State Act to Provide Occupational Safeguards for Operators of Video Display Terminals (VDTs), The Newspaper Guild, Washington, D.C.

41. 1983 Assembly Bill 1076, State of Wisconsin, 1983-84 Legislature, introduced by Representatives Clarenbach, Looby, Seery, Becker, and Andrea and co-sponsored by Senator Norquist.

42. Slesin, op. cit., p. 41.

43. Ibid.

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44. Diana Hembree and Loren Stein, "VDT regulation: The publishers counterattack," Columbia Journalism Review (November/December 1984), p. 42.

45. Eisen, op. cit., p. 630.

46. Ibid.

47. "Study says VDT radiation not harmful," Publishers' Auxiliary, Jan. 14, 1985, p. 1.

48. Ibid., p. 2.

49. Hendricks, op. cit., p. 631.

50. Ibid., p. 635.

51. E.g., NIOSH 1981 Report, supra note 12, at 68-70 (rest breaks, glare control, proper lighting, and careful furniture design are among NIOSH's recommendations).

52. "Microwave Suit Heats Up," National Law Journal, Sept. 14, 1981, at 24, col. 3.

53. McCloud, op. cit., p. 162.

54. Neergaard, op. cit., at 7.

55. Ibid.

56. Cashau, op. cit., at 3.

57. Ibid., at 2, 3.

58. Ibid., at 6.

59. Brown and Cashau, op. cit., at 3, 9.

60. Ibid., at 4.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid., at 5.

63. Hembree and Stein, op. cit., p. 42.

64. Letter from David R. West, executive director of the Illinois Press Association, to Don Sneed, Feb. 8, 1985.

65. Letter from J. LeRoy Yorgason, executive secretary and manager of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association, to Don Sneed, Feb. 22, 1985.

66. Letter from Linda Falkman, manager of the Minnesota Newspaper Association, to Don Sneed, Feb. 28, 1985.

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67. Kenneth L. Drum, executive director of the Ohio Newspaper Association, testimony in opposition to Ohio House Bill 552 before Ohio House Health & Retirement Committee, 1983-84 session.

68. Letter from Kenneth L. Drum to Don Sneed, March 11, 1985.

69. Drum, op. cit., at 3.

70. Hembree and Stein, op. cit., at 43.

71. Ibid.

72. Ibid., at 44.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Carroll, op. cit, at 6.

76. Ibid.

77. See supra note 41, at 2.

78. Carroll, op. cit., at 6.

79. Brown and Cashau, op. cit., at 5.

80. Hembree and Stein, op. cit., at 44.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Letter from Paul Conrad, executive director of Allied Daily Newspapers, to Don Sneed, Feb. 14, 1985.

86. James, op. cit., at 5.

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